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CORRESPONDENCE

THE HERMAPHRODITE RIME

In the Wisconsin *Shakespeare Studies*, 1916 (pp. 174-200) Professor R. E. N. Dodge has an interesting paper, reviewed in your issue for last November, on the curious sixteenth century rime *king—seeing, emperour—honour*, and the like; a rime which, being masculine-feminine, should be called hermaphrodite. For greater completeness I will call attention to a footnote on p. 679 of an article of mine on “The Siege of Troy in Elizabethan Literature,” in the *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. xxx, where I observed that it is not only particularly frequent in Peele’s *Tale of Troy*, but that it was deliberately cultivated, with very pleasing effect, in certain Irish-Gaelic poetry. See Douglas Hyde, *Literary History of Ireland*, p. 483. Of course I did not regard the Irish usage as a likely source for the English, but believed (and Mr. Dodge suggests) that the latter was due to a misreading of certain rimes in Chaucer.

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THE MARRIAGE SERVICE IN CHAUCER’S *Merchant’s Tale*

It is the climax of the *Merchant’s Tale* as a drama; January, complacent and triumphant, has had his way with his friends and gained a wife to his mind, and the sordid tragedy has not begun to settle down on the poor old creature. Chaucer decorates this high point of his story with glimpses of ritual and festivity.

To the chirche bothe be they went
For to receyve the holy sacrament.
Forth comth the preest, with stole aboute his nekke,
And bad hir be lyk Sarra and Rebekke,
In wisdom and in trouthe of mariage;
And seyde his orisons, as is usage,
And crouched hem, and bad god sholde hem blesse,
And made al siker y-nogh with holinesse, (E 1701-8)

—a composite of picturesque or significant bits from the order for matrimony and from the nuptial mass which would follow. Just such touches would readily come to the mind of one familiar with the liturgy. First we catch sight of the priest vested for the *Ordo ad benedicendum sponsum et sponsam*; the stole would hardly be visible about his neck later, when he is vested for the nuptial mass, being almost concealed by the chasuble. It is from this mass that we next hear a bit, from one of the ‘orisons’ (headed